

Transcript: Open Access Podcast, Episode 3

Host: Aniruddho Chokroborty-Hoque

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/wlpres/79/>

[Host]: 2019. The University of California education system does not renew its deal with one of the world's largest academic publishing houses, Elsevier. Partly because Elsevier refuses to provide greater open access publications for University of California researchers.

Western University learns of this and something clicks. It forms a Task Force on Open Access and Scholarly Communications. It consults, surveys, and concludes that the time is ripe to educate faculty, students, and staff on the scholarly publishing environment and alternative models. Because a well-informed campus embracing open access means Western can navigate the future of the publishing world and spread knowledge for society's benefit.

Benjamin Hill is the Editor-in-Chief for *Locke Studies*, an open access peer-reviewed annual journal on contemporary research on the English philosopher John Locke. Hill is a Western University philosophy professor.

[Benjamin Hill]: I think when people think about journals and access they think about their own access and what they have. And if they have access to it, that's usually sufficient. Whereas they don't think about what access means to scholars around the world, or what access means to scholars in 50 years' time. If we, as a group, emphasize more the fact that this is an important academic value, it's not a mere convenience, that we make sure to emphasize that it's really good for everybody, I think people will take more notice than what they have.

[Host]: The Task Force finds, for example, that contractual policies are one of the most effective drivers of open access, but scholars need to understand it very well in order to use it successfully. In contractual policies, authors are prohibited from giving all their rights to publishers and can give some rights to the university. Authors retain the right to publish and deposit in journals of their own choosing.

In fact, academics have taken matters into their own hands. In 2012, Timothy Gowers, a University of Cambridge mathematician and winner of the Fields Medal—the Nobel Prize equivalent for mathematics—blogged about the sky-high prices charged by academic journals, and vowed to stop sending his papers to Elsevier. The post went viral. In 2016, he launched an online mathematics journal that is non-profit and open access. Others followed. Last year, the entire editorial board of Elsevier's *Journal of Informetrics* resigned and started their own non-profit open access journal with MIT Press.

Why is this happening? Apart from the basic ethics of publicly funded research being openly accessible to the public, many researchers believe that the publishing industry has too much influence over what researchers choose to study.

Journals like new and spectacular results. Academics notice and align their work and journal submissions accordingly. It helps both groups: scientists get noticed and journals sell

subscriptions. But this means that important work like negative results, for example, are not published in relevant journals. This means academics often do not have the full picture of all research in their field.

But university scholars face challenges when creating their own open access journals. Jerry White is the Editor-in-Chief Emeritus for the *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, an open access peer reviewed research journal focusing on issues pertaining to Indigenous peoples throughout the world. He's a Western University sociology professor.

[Jerry White]: Secure enough money for six months to be able to actually operate. Set really firm guidelines. In terms of when you're inviting people to submit, make sure that your turnaround times are short, as short as any other journal in the area, if not better, and adhere to those turnaround times. This is one of the things that was really appreciated by senior scholars who had, were parked for sometimes a year or two years at other journals, we were able to turn them around in three months and be publishing best-by and that is really important. The third is to identify worldwide, or at least in the country that you live in, key researchers, key research teams, key stakeholders and key people who would be interested in reading and using the research that's in your subject area and send out pointed advertising and social media to those people directly, announcing your journal and inviting them to participate.

The other things that we would say is that you have to attend conferences, you have to have in your presentations and things of your own research, you must have mention of your journal, you have to promote the journal, because you have to introduce it, it's something new. And lastly, before you publish, make sure that you've reached out and at least invited some very specific, first couple of issues, articles that you have all prepared, and you turn around and publish good quality in your first, second issues of your journal. And after that, then it's going to take on a life of its own.

[Host]: University-based open access journals work for niche fields and niche audiences. Besides, publishing quality research is difficult. Find talented people who vet articles, create and maintain a website, and build a reputation. It takes time and money. And the investment may not always work. Here is Benjamin Hill:

[Benjamin Hill]: I think the reason why those journals are more impactful because in fact, this has a lot to do with advertising, it has a lot to do with reach. And the for-profit publishers, they do things, they do some things very well. And those are the things they do very, very well. They're able to improve production values, they're able to speed the publication process along because they have a number of in-house resources. Most open access stuff that I'm aware of just doesn't have those resources. And so, even though it can be faster than a traditional journal, especially with online, it doesn't have the ways of advertising itself and doesn't have the ways of marketing and building reputation. And reputation takes many, many years to build.

[Host]: Western has been successful.

[Benjamin Hill]: I knew what they did, and how, how good they were at doing it. And I just knew that when the idea of trying to build a relationship with *Locke Studies*, or trying to bring

Locke Studies into the Locke Society fold, that Western Libraries would be the ideal people to work with, so I just kind of reached out to them, but it's simply because I knew who they were and what they did, and how good they, they really are.

[Host]: Could you kindly break the last two points for me, Dr. Hill? You know, what they did? And you know how good they were? Could you, could you just describe that in a bit more detail?

Currently, Western Libraries helps Western University scholars create and maintain open access journals through its Open Journal Systems, or OJS, platform. The service is free. It partners with the Ontario Council of University Libraries and Scholars Portal to host and distribute more than 30 open access journals.

[Benjamin Hill]: The very first thing I would do is I would set up a meeting with the librarians to talk about open access through OJS. I mean that was the most important thing, just to see what it's like to be publishing online like that. I mean, as far as other Dos would go, the more that you can focus on the content and not on the technology and the platform, the better. And that's one of the nice things about OJS is that they really take care of a lot of the publishing platform itself. I would think hard about your work process as well, how you want to go about actually building and editing the journal. As far as Don'ts go, I would suggest, don't try to go it alone. Don't try to self-publish. Focusing in on connecting with other journals and other open access materials is really, really important as well. That's where I think if we're going to get any sort of advertising support, it's going to be when we start working together. And I hope that the industry can start moving in that direction.

[Host]: The library spends \$150,000 every year supporting open access initiatives at Western University. Here is White:

[Jerry White]: We found the University incredibly supportive of the open access process. I think they looked at the IIPJ kind of the way they would look at a graduate student launched, department-based journal, which are very important kinds of ways for graduate students and others to publish their work. I think they looked at it that way. And they supported it that way, giving us a place, a portal, access, so that whatever we did in terms of publicizing, getting it ranked in different search engines, you know, all those things that we paid for and we did, they were there, technologically and supportively, to allow that to be, to work in the maximum positive way. We have had zero technical kinds of issues with them.

[Host]: It has also created Scholarship@Western, an open access repository where you can freely access electronic theses and dissertations from Western scholars. The repository shares open access articles, author-accepted peer reviewed manuscripts, conference papers, posters, open access books, reports, video presentations, and oral histories.

Open access content has steadily increased across the globe, according to data from the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association. In fact, universities are slowly redefining their relationships with scholarly publishing houses. Last year, Norwegian universities forced Elsevier to a new licensing contract where work published by Norwegian authors would be open access in most of Elsevier's journals. In Germany, almost 700 libraries and institutes gave an ultimatum to

another publishing behemoth, Wiley: We'll pay for the content in all your journals, but only if you make that content open access for everyone else at no additional cost. Institutions in Sweden, Norway, Hungary, and Germany are also getting together as Coalition S, an initiative that hopes to make all scientific publications resulting from publicly funded research grants to be open access by 2021.

But the scholarly publishing industry isn't going anywhere—not so easily. They remain strong. They still exert a lot of influence, and they're changing strategies. Elsevier, for example, is pivoting to data mine its enormous library. It will use statistics and artificial intelligence to tell us about research trends, recommend articles scientists ought to be reading, and suggest co-authors to collaborate with based on shared interests. Even if they lose money from dwindling subscriptions, in a way, they will still control the content.

There is still much to learn. Ryan Merkley, CEO of Creative Commons, had this to say. The source is the documentary film *Paywall*.

[Ryan Merkley]: Priorities are going to change. And I believe that Elsevier is a business full of smart people who want discovery to happen, but don't have a better idea on how to make money in the middle. And unfortunately for them, the internet is the story of breaking down gatekeepers. And they're the gatekeeper standing between, in some cases, research and discovery.

[Host]: Do listen to episodes one and two. This was episode three of a three-part series on open access and the scholarly publishing industry. The series is a collaboration between Radio Western and Western Libraries.

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